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EMERGING CONCEPTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

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IN THE PAST 15 YEARS, MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING HAS CHANGED RADICALLY, AND THE CONTINUING CONTROVERSY WILL PROVOKE EVEN FURTHER CHANGES. CURRENT INTEREST DEMANDS A MODIFICATION OF THE AUDIOLINGUAL APPROACH TO INCLUDE TRAINING, AS SOON AS PEDAGOGICALLY FEASIBLE, IN ALL FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS. INCREASED ENROLLMENTS AND EXTENDED STUDY SEQUENCES HAVE FORCED STUDENT PLACEMENT TO BE BASED ON DEMONSTRATED PROFICIENCY RATHER THAN ON LENGTH OF STUDY. THE LARGE NUMBER OF HIGHLY QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS NEEDED TO EXECUTE THESE CHANGES NECESSITATES IMMEDIATE ACTION IN THE FIELDS OF TEACHER RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION, CERTIFICATION, AND PLACEMENT. THE GREAT POSSIBILITIES FOR FOREIGN CONTACTS HAVE TRIGGERED MASS TRAVEL ABROAD BY LANGUAGE TEACHERS, HAVE CAUSED THE PROLIFERATION OF STUDENT EXCHANGE PROGRAMS, AND HAVE MADE THE PROFESSION BROADEN ITS HORIZONS TO INCLUDE THE STUDY OF NON-WESTERN LANGUAGES. IF THE PROFESSION ANSWERS THE CHALLENGES BY FOLLOWING THE ENERGETIC LEADERSHIP OF STATE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL SUPERVISORS AND CONSULTANTS AND BY SUPPORTING SUCH UNIFYING ORGANIZATIONS AS THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, THE NEW POPULARITY OF LANGUAGE STUDY WILL NOT DIMINISH. THIS PAPER WAS DELIVERED AT THE MLA OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SPRING CONFERENCE (SANTA BARBARA, APRIL 29, 1967), AND WAS PUBLISHED IN "THE FORUM," VOLUME 5, NUMBER 4, JUNE 1967, PAGES 9-12. (AB)

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Emerging Concepts in Foreign Language Teaching*

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A Period of Change

Many, many things have happened in the teaching of foreign languages in the past fifteen years. The national and international situation, the interest of the American public, the attitude of our federal and state government, our methods and techniques, even our objectives, the organization of instruction, the materials and equipment available, the testing of results, enrollments, our professional organizations, state and college requirements, certification regulations, salaries too, fortunately; in fact, nearly everything connected with our profession has changed, often radically, in the past decade and a half. The changes are still going on, and on many of these matters, a lively battle is still raging, as you well know. I do not therefore bring you a picture of a silent fog-bound morning, when as the opaque blanket slowly lifts, you catch a glimpse in the distance of emerging familiar towers and landmarks. Rather, I would liken us to staff officers watching anxiously from a hillside above a battlefield, endeavoring as the dust and smoke billow up and around us, to recognize landmarks, to identify our positions, and to decide upon the appropriate strategy for our action. For it behooves us as language teachers to stop occasionally and look around us, to analyze our present situation, and above all to look ahead. With all caution, praying for wisdom in judgment, and remembering that circumstances may change almost overnight, let us try to identify some of the major concepts which seem to emerge at this moment in modern language teaching.

Public Supports FL

The first, most evident fact is that modern languages are popular now. The newspapers, magazines, radio and TV alude constantly to the importance of knowing another language. The federal and our state governments pass laws intended to develop and support the study of modern languages. I congratulate the State of California on the passage of the Casey Bill in 1961 requiring that every public school give instruction in a foreign language in Grades 6, 7, and 8. I urge you to keep up the fight for funds to implement this requirement, and also to prevent school systems from evading or curtailing such language instruction by a plea of shortage of funds. There is usually money enough to do the things that we really feel need to be done. The general public is your best aid. Country-wide, legislatures and boards of education are aware that the public wants more and better instruction in foreign languages. Those of you who remember the 1930's, when we were fighting for our very existence against declining enrollments caused by the grammar-translation and the silent reading methods, and by a national educational policy exclusively oriented toward the social sciences, will agree how revolutionary the change has been.

FL Teachers Must Unite To Produce Quality

Let us not assume, however, that the battle has been won. Our present strength is based largely on a public realization of a great national need to establish active communication with the rest of the world. We have claimed that we can teach our young people to communicate, and indeed orally, with people who speak another tongue. We have made a good beginning of it, and we know it is possible. But we've got to do a superb job in this really tough assignment, or the public will become disillusioned, lose patience, turn to other media; and we'll be out again. Public favor, popularity, is a fickle mistress, as many a political office seeker has discovered. We must determine that we can and will produce the results the public expects. We must follow the energetic leadership of the state, regional and local language supervisors and consultants which federal and local funds have made possible, and our other dedicated leaders. Let us put aside all jealousy and unhealthy competition between the languages. Let us give a helping hand in every possible way to our colleagues in the classical languages, for they are a foundation stone of the modern languages. The opportunity to be a united profession is now at hand, for the first time, in the new organization called the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). It will enroll as individual members any teacher of any foreign language at any level, in a unified professional association, something which has never been possible. The possible individual membership total of ACTFL is over 85,000. This ML Association of Southern California should also affiliate itself with ACTFL and be represented in its advisory assembly. We need this organization and its dynamic leadership to guide us in the present campaign to keep and merit our present public status, by achieving positive results.

Talk Is Successful

The second concept which seems to me to emerge from the dust and smoke of the battle is that the oral approach to language learning is a success. Debates will continue long and learned over the lack of scientific research data to prove the claim; but for me, I am reasonably satisfied to know from personal observation these three things: the kids do talk, they love it, and that's what the public wants and the nation needs. I shall not belabor the point, for I think you agree with me. The grammar-translation approach was intellectual but deadly dull; the direct reading approach was good communication in silence. Neither answered the needs of our international Twentieth Century, and the desire of peoples to talk to peoples.

Notice that I have said the "oral approach". The battle still goes on, when we come down to the level of techniques. It is not for me here to discuss in detail the merits or defects of the so-called A-LM methods and materials, even though your directors did consider naming the theme of this Conference, "After Audio-Lingual, What?" A-LM is simply one practical application, in technique, of a larger body of approaches originally called "aural-oral", then "audio-lingual" because it was easier to pronounce, and which ought to be called "audio-oral-visual" because it regularly and legitimately adds the visual technique of everything from flash cards to film strips, movies, overhead projection, and educational TV. They are talking now about a multi-sensory approach.

Multi-sensory Approach

One thing seems certain now. The rigid limitation of class instruction to the technique of stimulus-response pattern-practice now appears unnecessary after the early stages. Language is only partly a habit, say the newer studies in theoretical linguistics. For the "generative" grammarian like Chomsky, the child can acquire the ability to understand sentences and even to create grammatically correct sentences which he has never heard before. The linguistic basis of the rigidly controlled pattern-practice technique, after the first few months, is

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now thoroughly challenged. Besides we want to develop all **four** skills as rapidly as is pedagogically feasible, not any **two;** and an exclusively audio-lingual techniques does not accomplish our full four-fold objective.

It also appears unwise, since it fails to provide the necessary motivation because of its merger content. The older, more mature and intelligent the student is, the more restive he is. It seems desirable, therefore, cautiously and progressively to give greater flexibility to the audio-lingual technique, and to add more material of an interesting and challenging nature. This is true particularly in the transition to reading, when supplementary material is first presented orally, worked over orally, then becomes the basis for reading, and finally for writing. Strong motivation is the essence of good teaching; the pupil learns fastest what interests him; repetition that approaches boredom is always a mistake. The addition of informational and cultural material adapted to the student's age level and interests, suited to oral treatment, and stimulating of ideas for discussion, may create some problems of linguistic control, but pupil interest takes precedence over every technique or method. A book is still the basic "visual aid." When properly implemented with adequate content, the oral approach, the active use of the foreign language in the classroom, appears to sustain the greatest motivation.

Expansion — A Boon and Bane

A third major concept that impresses, yes frightens me, is the extraordinary enlargement of our domain. Not so long ago, High School students took French or Spanish for two years; then all but about 13% dropped it; and that was that. Now, it is possible for a boy or girl to begin a foreign language in kindergarten, and continue it without interruption into graduate school, a theoretical sequence of some twenty years. Only a very few will do so, but those are the boundaries of the Promised Land which we are now invited to enter and possess, and cultivate. When we add to the much longer sequences the many more different languages now taught (you have nine represented in your Association and you should add Latin and Greek), we begin to glimpse the expansion which has taken place.

Continuity Needed

If this entire sequence were directed and controlled by one central authority, the situation would be simpler, but it is not. FLES answers to the grade school curriculum; grades 6-7-8 to the Junior High; High School and College teachers sometimes get together, but more often not; even the undergraduate college and the graduate school do not talk the same language. The problems of placement, coordination and articulation between FLES, Junior and Senior High School, and college, are among the most complex and frustrating with which we have to deal. To make confusion worse confounded, a pupil may enter at any one of these stages. We must therefore have separate tracks for those who entered at third grade or before, at sixth, at ninth, and at first year college. Four tracks at each of at least five levels in X number of languages! Many more students are taking fifth year (or level) of language in High School, even if not enrolled in the growing Advanced Placement Program. The extreme mobility of our national population contributes greatly to the dislocation of the tracks. A boy begins French in one school in 6th grade; continues for three years; moves to a school that has no French, and begins Spanish in 9th grade; then is required by his Chemistry Department to begin German in College! Or a boy may begin Spanish in third grade, and in the next ten years study the language in five different schools, with five different programs and methods, and ten different teachers and textbooks!

Proficiency Testing

Such infernal confusion would be impossible of solution if it were not for the growing acceptance of the fact that the placement of a pupil must be decided not on the basis of the number of years of exposure but upon actual proficiency demonstrated in standardized tests. Fortunately, satisfactory proficiency tests are becoming available. The MLA Pupil Proficiency Tests, now distributed by the Educational Testing Service, are the best known; and there are other good ones that test the four skills and provide standardized norms for the interpretation of results. They may not be ideally perfect yet, but they make it possible to place a student at somewhere near his proper level, recognizing competence no matter how acquired or how long it took. I urge your interest in and support of Dr. André Paquette's work on Testing and Placement, especially the new project of the MLA, which he is directing, to investigate the procedures of colleges in placing students coming from the High Schools.

Teacher Preparation

A fourth major fact in the situation is, I believe, the recognition of the crucial role of the teacher. I began talking about this back in 1941. Now, at last, the teacher is recognized to be more important than the textbook, the laboratory, the method; in fact, the indispensable key to a successful program. Consequently, the preparation of language teachers has wisely become one of the central activities of four professional associations. The first constructive step was the Statement of Qualifications prepared in 1955 by the Steering Committee of the MLA - FL Program and endorsed by the major associations. The next step was the construction of the MLA Foreign Language Proficiency Tests under the direction of Wilmarth Starr, making possible the objective assessment of actual teacher competence. Meanwhile, our language associations had established a basis of cooperation with the various national associations concerned with the certification of teachers, and with officials of state boards of education. General agreement was reached that language teachers should be certified on the basis of the completion of an approved program of study and the demonstration of proficiency, not upon the accumulation of certain hours of credit. This made possible the very important MLA Study of Modern Foreign Language Teacher Preparation, energetically directed by Dr. André Paquette. One result of the Study is the set of Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages, published in the Golden Anniversary Issue of the Modern Language Journal of last October, and reprinted for wider distribution. I urge everyone of you to read this document carefully, and to support in every possible way the implementation of these Guidelines. Our professional future depends upon our success in putting them into practice for the effective preparation of teachers.

The public now demands language teachers who have mastered the language, who can and do use it in class, who are familiar with the foreign culture and interest their pupils in it. Government agencies are helping financially to make this competence possible; the NDEA Institutes in this country and abroad, the Fulbright, Smith-Hays and Office of Education fellowships and grants; the State Department exchange teaching posts, and many other study opportunities. We would now be telling a story of rapidly improving teacher preparation, if it were not for one major factor — the tragic shortage of teachers due to the rapidly increasing enrollments. For example, Spanish enrollments in Junior High Schools throughout the

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country increased from 103,000 to 327,000 between 1960 and 1965, an increase of 315%. I need not tell you that there is a desperate lack of well-trained teachers of modern and classical languages, with the result that insufficiently prepared teachers are being pushed into classrooms, often against their better judgment. California does as well or better than most states, but I note with regret that only about one-half of the state's foreign language teachers have a major **or a minor** in it.

We must therefore give much thought to teacher recruitment. We should conduct a constant campaign to identify and interest as future teachers young people of the ablest minds, richest personalities and finest character, demonstrating to them, especially by our own example, the advantages and rewards of a career as a teacher of a foreign language. I congratulate the MLASC on the very attractive leaflet it has printed and I urge you to use it intensively. I am also happy to learn of your project on Future Teachers.

I am confident that in our field, teacher recruitment, preparation, certification and placement will be done much better in the coming years, but the phenomenal growth of our whole domain makes it desperately important that we act quickly now, and that we plan better for the future. Our growth far exceeded our planning; we must catch up fast, or the situation may turn sour on us.

Foreign Contacts Easier

The fifth major concept that impresses me is our extraordinarily increased contacts with the foreign countries whose languages we study, and with foreign countries in general. Many factors are responsible, especially since World War II, but the jet airplane is perhaps the most significant. I can fly from Santa Barbara to Boston in about the same time I can drive from Boston to Middlebury. Distance has almost been annihilated. The contact with Central and South America, even between California and Spain or France or Germany or Japan, is now immediate, normal, expected, both for teachers and students. The good language teacher is assumed to have studied abroad. NDEA Institutes, government grants, charter flights, and leaves of absence all contribute to making it possible.

Our teen-age pupils are far more internationally minded and knowledgeable than their counterparts fifteen years ago. The most dramatic evidence of this interest is the growth of foreign study and the international exchange of students. At the college and junior college level, over 18,000 American students are recorded in 1965 as attending over 400 academic institutions abroad in 68 countries. No one knows how many young Americans go abroad each year to study; we do know that over 110,000 American passports were issued in the "student" category in 1965. Study-travel tours for High School students are multiplying fantastically. One organization boasts of sending 4,000 abroad last summer.

We must recognize that this will continue and accelerate, inevitably. We can see the possibility of great cultural profit in the movement. The contact with a foreign culture, when properly prepared and guided, can be a personal experience of the greatest importance, broadening the individual's cultural horizon and leading him to a better understanding of other peoples. Study abroad, properly prepared and conducted, can be an enriching intellectual experience. Even the opportunity to practice the foreign language gives great satisfaction. The student comes home bursting with information and impressions with which he can enrich his participation in class.

Criteria Established for Study Trips

At the same time, the rapid proliferation of summer tours for teen-agers, some of them entirely commercial, widely advertised, whose groups are often poorly directed, insufficiently chaperoned, with "study" only a camouflage, and which appeal to teachers as a way to get a free trip abroad, has alarmed many of us, including the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages. Seeing the impossibility of "accrediting" the good programs, or of blacklisting the bad ones, the National Council asked me to prepare a set of simple Guidelines or criteria for evaluating foreign study programs for high schools. The Council has approved by draft, and the FL supervisor in each state, after securing the approval of the State Superintendent or other chief state school officer, will print and distribute it widely in each state. This has been done in California. While recognizing and wishing to encourage the very great values of foreign travel and study, American high school teachers and administrators must see the dangers in the present situation, and become much more critical and discriminating, on the basis of accurate information, before permitting our young people to run the risk of an unfortunate experience.

Student Exchange

A word should be said also about the rich source of cultural contacts in the people and material now coming to us from foreign countries. Over 82,000 foreign students and 9,000 foreign scholars came to us in 1965 from 160 countries. A good percentage of them are here in California. These people are usually glad, when asked, to talk to our classes or student groups, and to aid with special projects. The American Field Service students are not sufficiently utilized. As for illustrative and supplementary materials, the list of possibilities is almost unlimited — films, film strips, slides, tapes, records, short-wave radio recordings, paper back books, pictures — all of which, with the equipment to use them, can be secured with money available through Title III or the ESEA.

Again I return to my leitmotif of "motivation". We talk much about the academic revolution, and the fact that students rebel at discipline and study only what they want to. True. Can't we see that the fascination which the world beyond our borders has for our young people can be an extraordinary advantage to us language teachers, if we would only capitalize on it much more than we do.

There are other "emerging concepts" that I wish I had time to discuss with you, such as the language laboratory, but I shall close with one more, my sixth, which seems to me of great importance: the study of the uncommon or non-Western languages. In 1965 there were over sixty secondary schools, public and private, that taught Chinese; a score or more that taught Japanese and Arabic. I note with pleasure that California has 16 high schools that teach Chinese; and that the Oriental Section participates actively in your Association. The Burton Bill (7604.5) encouraging the teaching of Chinese in the public schools of California is an excellent example for other states.

Non-European Languages

A student who began with FLES, and has had seven years of Spanish or French, and perhaps two years of Latin before Tenth Grade, is ready to tackle a non-Western language before college, and get a real head start for graduate work. I believe strongly that when a student has one foreign language well on its way to mastery, after perhaps five good strong years of it, at a point either late in High School or in the first two years in college, the next should be an uncommon or non-Western language.

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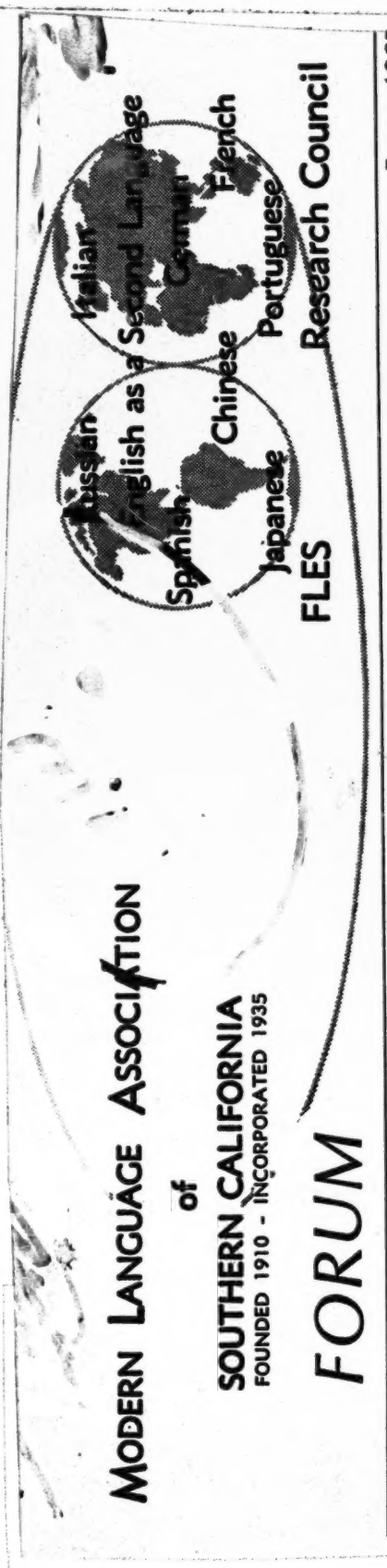
The best reason is that for us American products of a largely Western heritage, the cultural experience, the opening of a window onto a totally different world, is much more enriching and stimulating.

A very practical reason is that though our world is physically shrinking, it is expanding at an explosive rate politically, socially, economically, industrially, morally, even spiritually. Western Europe is only a very small part of the world that we need to know about. Our international relationships in all these fields create for us and especially for the coming generation a serious responsibility and a tremendous opportunity. Undergraduate and graduate students in the fields of the political and social sciences, in industry, business, and in the humanities as well, find the knowledge of a neglected language a valuable asset.

In this context, the non-Western languages are likely to appeal more to the non-language major. Fellowships for further study in graduate school are generous, and fairly easy to secure, but most of the students go into the fields I have mentioned, rather than into teaching. Trained teachers of these languages are very scarce, especially for the secondary schools. Native speakers are not automatically good teachers, but they can be trained, I believe that our profession, almost entirely oriented toward Western Europe in the past, must now broaden its horizons to include the languages and cultures of the rest of the world. We must encourage the study of them; aid the training of their teachers and the development of teaching materials; adapt our procedures and our organizations to include them.

We have been talking about major concepts in the teaching of foreign langauges that emerge about the dust and smoke of our daily battles. You have doubtless thought of others. It is good for us to meet, to talk together, to lift our eyes above the heat of the day, and look forward. We have many problems; but I can honestly say that the teaching of foreign languages is, in general, in a more healthy, dynamic state, than at any time in the past forty-four years of my experience. When the going is rough, let us never lose sight of the fact that of all the professions on earth, we belong to the one most clearly dedicated to the proposition that men can talk the same language together, that the barriers of word and idea can be broken down, that by communication and mutual understanding among peoples, peace can come on earth.



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